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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1587

INFO RUEHDL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000779

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/03/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV TU AM KPAL

SUBJECT: TURKEY-ARMENIA PUSH AFTER ELECTIONS; NO HAMAS VISIT

REF: ANKARA 0734

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an April 3 meeting with Turkish MFA U/S Ertugrul Apakan, Ambassador reviewed the status of the draft Armenian genocide resolution in Congress and discussed prospects for an opening in Turkish-Armenian relations, highlighting USG willingness to work with Turkey once the election cycle here finishes. Apakan and DG Americas Vefahan Ocak indicated that a window for forward-leaning steps could open after the May presidential election. On prospects for a Palestinian National Unity Government (NUG) visit to Ankara, Apakan reiterated the recent prime ministry statement that it was not on the agenda any time soon. End summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador urged that once Turkey's election cycle is complete, the GOT work with us on ideas and concrete steps Turkey can take to amend Article 301 and improve relations with Armenia. Turkey has worked successfully to improve relations with all its neighbors, save one: Armenia. Based on what we hear in Yerevan, the Armenians do not believe Turkey's offers to date are sincere; if they did, they have told us, they would redouble their own efforts with Turkey. Anything Turkey could do to reach out to Armenia in a meaningful way would be useful. It is a small, poor and vulnerable country, whereas Turkey is large, secure and relatively prosperous. An improvement in bilateral relations would also ease tensions in the Caucasus overall and open markets for eastern Turkey. One possibility would be to send a high-ranking political envoy to Yerevan. Reactivation of the MFA's own direct channel (which has been inactive since last fall) would be helpful, too. Americas DG Vefahan Ocak remarked that the presence of the Turkish Ambassador to Tblisi at PM Margarian's funeral had been well-received and was certainly intended as a forthcoming gesture.

¶3. (C) Apakan responded that the Turks need to find a bridge, but the timing must be right. It cannot occur before the presidential election, either here or in Yerevan. While a single move is unlikely to solve the whole problem, it could prove useful both for the region, and to relieve the tensions in US-Turkish relations that the annual cycle of the congressional genocide resolution creates. He expressed appreciation for Administration efforts on the resolution this year. Ocak indicated that after the presidential election would be a more suitable period for creativity. Apakan stressed that if Turkey makes real moves, it will lead to something, including relief on the resolution front.

¶4. (C) Ambassador noted that the current biggest threat that could propel passage of a genocide resolution in the House was the possibility of another Hamas visit to Turkey. This

issue had arisen following PM Erdogan's meeting with Palestinian President Abbas in Riyadh that had included PM Haniyeh. We understood that the invitation was general in nature and that Congressman Lantos had since spoken with FM Gul. We also have the text of the prime ministry statement denying that any visit will take place. Apakan responded that the PM's meeting had been with Abbas, who had brought Haniyeh into the meeting. Haniyeh would not be coming to Turkey anytime in the near future. Ambassador warned that while this series of steps appears to have reassured people in Washington and on Capitol Hill for now, it is a red line that the GOT should not cross.

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WILSON